AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1.   (currently amended) A network-based personal contact management system, comprising:

a networked server system that provides a user interface having functionality for users to establish relationships with other users such that each user may have one or more contacts;

a database that stores relationship data indicating the relationships established between the users via the user interface, wherein the relationship data identifies, for each respective user, which other users are contacts of the respective user; and

a search module that provides functionality for users to search the database for contacts of their respective contacts, such that a first user may submit a search request to identify wherein the search module is responsive to performance of a search by a first user by using said relationship data to identify other users that are contacts of contacts of the first user.

2.   (currently amended) The system of Claim 1, wherein the database additionally includes personal data records of the users, and the relationship data specifies permission levels granted by each respective user for allowing specific contacts of the respective user to view information from the personal data record of the respective user, and the server system controls access to the personal data records according to said permission levels.

3.   (original) The system of Claim 2, wherein the user interface includes a personal address book interface through which each user can view information about his or her respective contacts in accordance with the permission levels.

4.   (original) The system of Claim 1, wherein the relationship data specifies permission levels granted by users for sharing information with other users, and the search module searches for contacts of contacts in accordance with the permission levels.

5.   (original) The system of Claim 4, wherein the permission levels indicate, for each respective contact of the first user, whether the first user is authorized to search for contacts of the respective contact.

6.   (original) The system of Claim 4, wherein the permission levels indicate, for at least a second user who is a contact of the first user, whether the first user is permitted to search for contacts of the second user.

7.   (original) The system of Claim 1, wherein the search module provides functionality for the first user to search the database for contacts of contacts of the first user that reside in a common geographic region with the first user.

8.   (original) The system of Claim 1, wherein the search module provides functionality for the first user to search the database for contacts of contacts of the first user that are affiliated with a group with which the first user is also affiliated.

9.   (canceled)

10.   (original) The system of Claim 1, wherein the search module runs on the server system and is accessed by the users via the user interface.

11.   (original) In a network-based system that provides functionality for users to communicate with other users, a computer-implemented method for assisting users in locating other users with which to communicate, the method comprising:

        providing a database that stores, for each user of a plurality of users, information about contacts of the respective user;

        receiving, from a first user of said plurality of users, a search request to search for contacts of contacts of the first user; and

        in response to the search request, searching the database to identify a set of users who are contacts of contacts of the first user, and notifying the first user of the set of users.

12.   (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein searching the database comprises taking into consideration permissions granted by the users such that a second user who is a contact of a contact of the first user will not be exposed to the first user unless the second user has granted permission to allow such exposure.

13.   (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein searching the database comprises taking into consideration permissions granted by the users such that a second user, who is a contact of a third user who is a contact of the first user, will not be exposed to the first user unless both the second user and the third user have granted permissions that authorize such exposure.

14. (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein searching the database comprises taking into consideration permissions granted by the users such that contacts of a second user who is a contact of the first user are not searched unless the second user has granted permission to the first user to search for contacts of the second user.

15. (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein searching the database additionally comprises excluding a set of contacts of a second user who is a contact of the first user if the second user has not granted permission to the first user to search the second user's contacts.

16. (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein searching the database comprises taking residence information of the users into consideration to search for users who both (a) are contacts of contacts of the first user, and (b) reside in a common geographic region with the first user.

17. (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein searching the database comprises taking group affiliation data of the users into consideration to search for users who both (a) are contacts of contacts of the first user, and (b) are affiliated with a group with which the first user is also affiliated.

18. (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein notifying the first user of the set of users comprises informing the first user that a user in said set is affiliated with a group with which the first user is also affiliated.

19. (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein notifying the first user of the set of users comprises displaying an indication of how each user in the set is related to the first user.

20. (original) The method of Claim 11, further comprising providing to the first user an option to add a user from said set of users to a personal address book of the first user.

21. (original) The method of Claim 11, wherein the database additionally stores personal data records of the users, and permissions granted by the users for exposing information from their respective personal data records to other users, and the method further comprises providing user access to the personal data records in accordance with the permissions.

22-33: (canceled)

34. (new) The method of Claim 11, wherein searching the database comprises joining tables of said database to identify users who are contacts of contacts of the first user.

35. (new) The method of Claim 11, wherein notifying the first user of the set of users comprises generating a display that identifies, for a second user who is a member of the set, an intervening user who serves as a link between the first and second users.

36. (new) The system of Claim 1, wherein the search module identifies said other users that are contacts of contacts of the first user, at least in part, by performing a database join operation to join tables of said database.

37. (new) The system of Claim 1, wherein the search module is additionally responsive to performance of the search by notifying the first user how an identified contact of a contact of the first user is related to the first user.